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AN
ANSWER
by Thomas Balguy
To a BOOK, entitled,
LETTERS
CONCERNING
CONFESSIONS of FAITH,
AND
SUBSCRIPTIONS
TO
ARTICLES of RELIGION
IN
Protestant Churches,
Occasioned by the
CONFSSIONAL.

By Benjamin Dawson.

PART I.

LONDON,
Printed for F. NEWBERRY, No. 20, in St. Paul's Church-Yard.
MDCCCLXVIII.

AN
~~A. N. S. W. E. R.~~

TO A BOOK, entitled,

THE FIRST
A. N. S. W. E. R.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

LETTERS, &c.

ARTICLES OF RELIGION

By the
Baptist Church, &c.
A new edition, with
an original preface, &c.

CONFESSIO NAL

THE FIRST
A. N. S. W. E. R.

LONDON

Printed by J. B. ...

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~~_____~~
AN
ANSWER
TO
LETTERS, &c.

LETTER I.

Dear Sir,
As you desire to have my judgment
for the confirmation of your opinions,
or the conviction of your mistakes,
respecting the Confessional, you ought not to
be offended, if I give it without reserve.
Hear then, Sir, in one word, my judgment—
“ The *design* of the author of the Confessional
“ you have set in an *invidious* and *false* light.
B “ Your

" Your arguments in favour of the *right*, as
 " well as of the *utility*, of requiring such
 " subscription as the question hath respect to,
 " are inconclusive. Your attempting to vin-
 " dicate the lawfulness of a *latitude* in sub-
 " scribing, not to mention the concern it
 " gives me on another more important con-
 " sideration, is inconsistent with your plea for
 " the *utility* of subscription. Your objections
 " to, and reflections upon, the expedient of-
 " fered by our author, to put this matter of
 " subscription upon a better footing, strike
 " equally against *all* expedients, and too plainly
 " indicate what turn they are intended to
 " serve."

I am,

Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

WITHOUT any apology, Sir, for the frankness with which I have given you my judgment upon your remarks on the Confessional, I proceed to support it by a consideration of what you have advanced. And first, for the design of the Confessional.

The Confessional, you tell us, "however it may appear, at first sight, to be wrote in its favour of the protestant cause, appears to you "to aim at more than perhaps the author is "willing, at present, to acknowledge."*—An insinuation this, that the Confessional may not appear, on a second sight, or more attentive perusal, to have been written in favour of the protestant cause. Your second letter is wholly taken up with attempting to shew, that the

author's

author's *real* design is different from that which he in general *professes* to have: And at page 154, after having hinted it in almost every preceding page, you speak out your apprehension, that "the tendency of the arguments in the Confessional is *entirely* to *subvert* the ecclesiastical establishment itself."

Such is the light in which you have set the *design* of our author. Ah, Sir, how little regard is due to professions of candour in a Controversialist! "I am far," said you, "from wishing to set our author's design in *an odious light.*" *

Yours, &c.

* Letters, page 1.

LETTER

LETTER III.

FROM the invidiousness of the charge, which you have brought against our author, respecting the *aim* and *design* of the Confessional, I pass on, Sir, to consider the ground on which you would support that charge.

THE *real* design of this noted work, though you own only further reformation of the articles is in general pleaded for, is yet, you apprehend, to shew, "*That all ecclesiastical establishments, with a test of principles, are unlawful.*" * Many particular expressions, in your judgment, import no less; and the whole tenour of the arguments confirm it. Those expressions, which you have produced as select instances, I shall first examine with as much brevity, as a compliance with your request will admit of.

* Letters, page 2.

OUR author has said, "*The toleration con- tended for by the advocates of religious free- dom, was absolute liberty, just and true liber- ty, equal and impartial liberty, upon the prin- ciple, that neither single persons, nor churches, nay, nor even commonwealths, have any just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other, upon pretence of religion.*" *

This is the first instance you bring in proof of our author's design being to show, *That all ecclesiastical establishments, with a test of principles, are unlawful.* On comparing these two propositions with the greatest attention, I am not able to perceive such an agreement between them, as should lead me to infer the latter from the former. Certainly there appears to be no necessary, no immediate connection between the two. On the contrary, I find no difficulty in conceiving the lawfulness of an ecclesiastical establishment, with a test of principles,

* Confessional, preface to the first edition, page 52 of the second edition.

† Letters, page 3.

on the reasoning of the advocates of religious freedom; nay, an ecclesiastical establishment, which has a purely *scriptural* test of principles, without any mixture of human and dubious principles, I cannot conceive (such is my notion of gospel-liberty) to come short of that *absolute, just, true, equal and impartial* liberty, which is contended for. To me, therefore, it is no proof of a design to subvert *all* ecclesiastical establishments, that our author is found in company with these *unreserved* advocates for religious freedom.—But let us see how you arrive at your conclusion.

"Now, you argue, as our author all along
 "calls the requiring subscription an unjust im-
 "position, and invasion of Christian liberty, he
 "must look upon all such requiring of subscription,
 "to be an invasion of the liberty he contends
 "for; and consequently unlawful."*—Here are

two

* Letter, page 3.

two things which prevent my admitting the proof.—One is, that whereas you affirm, that our author *all along* calls the requiring subscriptions an *unjust imposition and invasion of Christian liberty*: I do not know that he hath *ever* called it so: And as, upon this suggestion of your's, I have carefully searched the Confessional, and don't find it to be the case, and moreover find, that the author has actually acknowledged the seasonableness of requiring subscription of a certain kind, I have surely great reason to believe, that you assert this upon no just ground.—The other thing is, that I cannot be certain of your meaning in saying, “all *such* requiring of subscription.”—All such as what?—Would you not shew, that our author is against *all* subscription?—That he aims at the subversion of *all* ecclesiastical establishments, with a test of principles?—Is not the expression we are now considering fixed upon as importing *no less*?—It is difficult therefore to understand what you refer to, when you say,
“such

“such requiring of subscription.”—But you add, “nay, the very force of the argument depends upon this sense of his expression; because he is here endeavouring to shew, that the test-act, or any test-act requiring religious conformity, is such an invasion.”*—In which also you are under a mistake: For he is here only speaking of *test laws*, religious tests, enjoined as a qualification for holding civil offices; which have been esteemed by very eminent men, and those no friends to ecclesiastical anarchy, to be indefensible, “upon the principle, that neither single persons, nor churches, nay, nor even commonwealths, have just title to invade the civil rights and worldly goods of each other, upon pretence of religion.” The question here is not, whether ecclesiastical establishments, with a test of principles, be lawful or not? But, whether a certain circumstance in our, or any other ecclesiastical establishment, can be justi-

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fied

fied on the principle of toleration? This is evident from the manner in which our author's remarks on this subject of test laws are introduced. "I shall," says he, "for the present content myself with a few remarks upon *one interesting circumstance* in our present establishment."* So that your concluding, that he entertains the design of subverting our present ecclesiastical establishment, from this expression under consideration, seems to be owing to your misapprehension of his argument in this place, which is not to shew, that *any* test-act requiring *any* religious conformity is an invasion of christian liberty, (for a *scriptural* test is allowed of, and even pleaded for) but that *such kind* of tests, as he there treats of, are inequitable, are defects and blemishes in those ecclesiastical establishments which admit them, and are not to be supported but on such reasoning as would destroy a *toleration*, in the only true sense of that word.

* Preface to first edition, page 46.

ANOTHER expression, which you quote as an instance of the author's design, is the following, [Confessional, chap. 1. pag. 24, 25.]

"The practice of requiring subscription to human explications of christian doctrine, is now considered and treated, by many different sorts of sensible writers, as an unwarrantable encroachment on christian liberty"

The matter is here, you think, plain with regard to *all* subscription, "except such as is mentioned in page 17 of this chapter."* And is not that, I would ask you, a very material and extensive exception, and enough to satisfy you, that his design is far from being to subvert, or even to oppose *all* ecclesiastical establishments with a test of principles?—But what have you to say to our author's admitting the reasonableness of requiring subscription to the declarations contained in pag. 382, 383?—You will tell me, perhaps, that this is much of the same kind with the exception mentioned above, and

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which

* Letters, page 3.

which you propose to consider hereafter. Be it so. In the mean time, you are to take notice, that, in the expression we have to do with at present, our author doth not deliver *his own* sentiments upon the practice of requiring subscription, but only observes, how it is now considered and treated by *many different sorts of sensible writers*; and he is not to answer for their opinions. But, admitting that we are to look upon this as a declaration of *his own* opinion on the case, yet the thing here objected to, is not the establishing *any* test of principles, or the requiring subscription *at all*, but only the practice of requiring subscription to *human explications of christian doctrine*, without the least hint at the unlawfulness of an ecclesiastical establishment, with a *scriptural* test of principles.

Of the same kind is the next instance which you urge from Confessional, page 26, viz.

" All

" All imposed subscriptions to articles of faith,
 " and religious doctrine, conceived in unscriptural
 " terms, and enforced by human authority, are
 " utterly unwarrantable."* What has been
 observed, therefore, on the preceding instance,
 may suffice to expose the weakness of this.
 I shall only add, that at page 14, you your-
 self have observed, that our author acknow-
 ledges the equity of requiring *some* subscription.
 The invidious insinuation, which is subjoined
 to the quotation last mentioned, of the author's
 artful concealment of his full design, and your
 suspicion of his connection with the candid
 Disquisitors, shall be passed by; my purpose
 at present being only to convince you, that
 these three expressions in the Confessional,
 which you have selected as particular instances
 of the author's aim to subvert all ecclesiastical
 establishments, are far from being satisfactory
 instances thereof, and that they afford not
 any

any just ground for the unfavourable suspicion which you have taken up against this eminent pleader for the pure profession of genuine christianity.

I am,

Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

THE expressions, which you have selected as particular instances of the real design of the Confessional, having been considered, I come briefly to shew you, that your suspicion has no better ground from the *whole tenour* of the arguments

“Is not,” you ask, “the very first enquiry
 “proposed in the title-page, concerning the right
 “in general of establishing confessions?”*—To
 which I answer: If it be so, yet the proposing
 such an enquiry doth not necessarily imply a
 design of shewing, *that all ecclesiastical establishments,
 with a test of principles, are unlawful.*
 But, as it happens, your question can be
 answered in the negative: For the enquiry
 proposed in the title-page is *not* concerning the
 right *in general* of establishing confessions,
 but *in particular* “of establishing SYSTEMA-
 “TICAL confessions of faith and doctrine, &c.”
 unless the title-pages to our books differ. I
 refer now, and shall always, except where
 notice is given to the contrary, to the second
 edition of the Confessional, the same which
 you always quote.—“Is there not,” you add,
 “an whole chapter employed in this enquiry?”†
 I answer, No. There is indeed a whole
 chapter

* Letters, page 5.

† Ibid.

chapter employed in enquiring into "the claim
 "of a right to establish confessions as tests of
 "orthodoxy;" and those confessions must be
 understood to be of *human* contrivance, because
 they are to attest, that the subscriber believes
 as the church, that sets them forth, believes;
 for this is the meaning of *orthodoxy*, when
 applied to explications of scripture.†

You

* Confessional, page 28.

† *Orthodoxy* is a Greek word which signifies a right opinion;
 and hath been used by *churchmen* as a term to denote a *soundness*
 of doctrine or belief, with regard to all points and articles of faith.
 But, as there have been amongst these churchmen several systems of
 doctrine or belief, they every one assert for themselves, that they
only are orthodox, and in the right; and that all others are
 heterodox, or in the wrong.—What is orthodox at *Rome* is
 heterodoxy at *Geneva*, *London*, and many other places.—What
 was orthodox here in the reign of king *Edward VI.* became
 heresy in the reign of his sister *Mary*: And in queen *Elizabeth's*
 time things changed their names again. Various was the fate of
 these poor words in the reigns of our succeeding kings, as the
 currents of *Calvinism*, *Arminianism*, and *Popery*, ebbed or flowed.

Dr. ROBERTSON's *Attempt to explain the Words Reason,*
Creeds, Subscription, &c. Third Edit. pag. 113, 114.

You go on to ask, "*Are not all the arguments calculated to shew, that there is neither necessity, equity, nor utility, in such establishments?*" Such establishments as what?—Would you say, as ecclesiastical establishments in general?—If so, I answer in the negative.—All the arguments in the Confessional are not calculated to shew that, but only to shew, that there is neither necessity, equity, nor utility, in establishing *unscriptural* tests of principles.

AGAIN you ask, "*Does not the author endeavour to shew, that our articles can neither honestly be subscribed with latitude, nor with promise?*"—He doth not, that I know of; and this query being put, without producing one instance of such an attempt, must be considered as another mere invidious insinuation. The question immediately subjoined to this

• Letter, page 5.

† Ibid.

I do not comprehend, and therefore can say nothing to it.

But you go on demanding, "Does he not employ a long preface on Dr. Rutherford, because he has undertaken a vindication of this general right?"—Softly, Sir! why will you remind the public of our friend's successful and uncreditable attempt?—But may not one employ his pen against such a general vindicator of subscription to articles of faith, without incurring the suspicion of aiming to subvert all ecclesiastical establishments?

Our author's opposition to another eminent Theologian, is next brought in confirmation of the suspicion you have taken up against him.

"Does he not," you ask, "largely oppose the bishop of Gloucester, for shewing that our accepting the protection of the civil power is allowable on Gospel principles?"—Pray, Sir, what

* Letter, page 5.

† Ibid.

what passage in the Confessional do you refer to?—Our author, in his preface to the first edition of that work, is pretty large in shewing the encumbrances, which attended that prelate's enterprize, of vindicating *the test-law* upon the hypothesis of *an alliance between Church and State*.—But I find nothing there, nor in any other part of the Confessional, urged against the lawfulness of our accepting the protection of the civil power. On the contrary, if you would not let an unreasonable and ridiculous jealousy of the consequences of the least innovation possess you, you might recollect many passages which indicate very friendly intentions towards the clergy, those among them especially, who stand most in need of the protection of the civil power, against the pretensions of any that would lord it over their consciences. Nor ought you to judge him less a friend to *us* of the establishment, because he would plead the right, of *all* undoubtedly

protestant

protestant and useful ministers of the Gospel,
 to an equal protection from the civil power.
 Should our eye be evil, because he is good,
 and desirous of being servicable to others also?

LASTLY, you say, "*How can we be mis-
 taken in supposing this to be the design of the
 Confessional, when those avowed supporters of it,
 the monthly reviewers, no doubt, are of the
 same opinion?*"—Very complimentary in-
 deed upon those gentlemen!—But has not
 your friend, whose judgment on your senti-
 ments is requested, some reason to take this
 preference amiss?—You are of opinion, that
 our author is against all subscriptions.—The
 monthly reviewers are of the same opinion.—
 Therefore you cannot be mistaken in your
 opinion.—A just inference, if the reviewers
 are infallible. But may you not be mistaken
 in supposing these gentlemen to be of your
 opinion, as to the design of the Confessional?

No.—

No—There is no doubt of it, you think;
 “for they would never bestow such eulogiums
 upon it, unless they supposed it defended their
 sentiments; and they positively declare, they are
 “against all subscriptions.”* But this is to
 detract as much from the impartiality of these
 gentlemen, as before you gave to their judg-
 ment; and to suppose their eulogiums to be
 founded chiefly in prejudice. If I understand
 them aright, however, they rather intimate, in the
 review you allude to, that the Confessional
 being an attempt only to set this matter of
 subscription on a better footing, comes not up
 to their idea of reforming, who are for no sub-
 scriptions. Be this as it may, since they have
 positively declared, they are against all sub-
 scriptions, and only further reformation of the
 articles is in general pleaded for by our author,
 what think you of taking up the argument
 against them?—As it is, you seem to have
 engaged

engaged in a dubious cause. — Write then,
 Sir, pray write against the monthly reviewers,
 those avowed Latitudinarians, those troublesome
 Biologists on the side of the Confessional.

I am,

Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER V.

Dear Sir,

HAVING laid before you my reasons for
 judging, that you have placed the design
 of the Confessional in an invidious and false
 light, I come now to make good my second
 censure upon your remarks, which respects the
 right and utility of requiring subscription, &c.

You

You enter upon this subject with insinuations that our author might have reasons, not of the most reasonable kind, for reversing his enquiry concerning the *right*, after thus enquiring the *utility* or success, of establishing confessions. One reason, which you surmise he might have, for taking this method, is, "that he might raise some prejudices against the utility of confessions,—in order to gain a more favourable attention to his attack on the right of enjoining them."* Well then, Sir, may not the motive with you for reversing our author's method, have been to raise some prejudices in favour of the right of establishing confessions, in order to gain a more favourable attention to your attack upon his arguments against the utility of enjoining them?—However it be, you shall not have that pretext of unfairness in me. For which reason I shall comply with your proposal, "that we first enquire into the *right*."

You

You think it necessary here, for the sake of precision, the want of which you blame in our author, to consider the claim of this right in a threefold view, viz. "the legal or positive right, derived from the civil power; the equitable right; and that derived from scripture."* This is but to affect precision; and the distinction you would make, instead of clearing the way for a more accurate discussion of this point, serves only to clog and encumber the question.†

The subject of the proposed enquiry is, "the right of establishing confessions of faith,"‡ not the legal right derived (to the church in these matters) from the civil power.† The church, which you consider here as distinct from the state, that is, church-governors, are not the establishers of confessions. To establish

* Letters; page 7.

† Ibid. page 6.

‡ Ibid. page 7.

them is the province of the whole legislative body of the realm. The church may derive a peculiar authority from the civil power concerning them, *when established*: But the *legal* or positive right of *establishing* them is in the *legislature*. And therefore, the *legal* right, in this matter, it cannot be any way necessary to enquire into. It would be only to enquire, whether law-givers have a *legal* right to make *laws*. And as to any legal right, derived to the church from the civil power, respecting established confessions, that is another question. So that when you propose to enter, first of all, on the consideration of a "legal right derived to the church from the civil power," it is you that use not "sufficient precision, as to the "particular species of right," and thereby confound, or load with extraneous matter, the present subject of our enquiry.

legal right to non-resistance and to the civil power to enter into a consideration of the civil right derived to the church from the civil power.

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WHETHER

WHETHER what you have advanced, therefore, in relation to the statute of 13. *Edw.* be solid, falls not properly under our consideration, being only a question of *fact*, viz. whether subscription to all and every of the 39 articles be by that act, or by the act of uniformity referring to it, enjoined or not? It comes, indeed, to be also a question of right, in respect of *those*, who claim an authority to require such subscription in consequence of the act. But whether *they* exercise a legal right in this matter, is a question foreign to that concerning the right of establishing confessions; and might, I think with you, be determined, could the *præbiteri* with propriety be brought to account *there* for their conduct, in one of the courts of *Westminster*.

BUT how comes our author then, you may ask, to enter into a consideration of this "legal right derived to the church from the civil
" power?"

“power?”—I answer, that he doth this only *occasionally*, and has had the precision to keep it distinct from the consideration of the right of *establishing* confessions. Thus, what gave occasion to treat of it in the passage of the Confessional to which you refer, was Dr. Rutherford’s having “opened his *Charge* with “a recital of the 36th canon of the church of “*England*; as if that particular law of our “*church was to have been the principal*, if “not the *sole* object of his *vindication*.” Another occasion of considering this point is taken in Chap. VII. in which the author attempts to discover, whence the practice of subscribing the 20 articles in different senses was derived, &c. But it has nothing to do with the question discussed in the second chapter of the Confessional, and which we are now upon, viz. the claim of a right to establish confessions. In our enquiry, therefore, concerning this claim, it can only be necessary

necessary to treat of the *equitable* right in this matter, and that derived from *scripture*.

I am,
 Sir,
 Your's, &c.

LETTER VI.

THE legal right, either of *establishing* confessions, or, through an authority derived to the church from the civil power, of requiring subscription to them, being out of the question, we come now to consider the *equitable* right of *establishing* confessions—*human, systematical* confessions of faith, as tests of orthodoxy. I add this, as necessary to prevent confusion and uncertainty on the subject.

If

If you will give yourself the trouble to consult the 16th and 17th pages of the preface to the second edition of the Confessional, you must be convinced of the propriety of affixing these epithets, from a remark there made on Dr. Rutherford's loose manner of wording the design of his *Vindication*; and I should think, moreover, that remark must make you wonder at your own suspicion of our author's design. ~~But to the question~~

"The author of the Confessional," you say, "has repeatedly asserted, as a protestant principle, that every man has a right to judge for himself of the sense of scripture, and the obligations he is laid under thereby." Now on this very principle you undertake to shew, that the claim in question is equitably made. On this principle I agree to try it with you, and shall follow you step by step to the

upshot
* Letter, page 13.

upfront of your reasoning upon it. If I be
 tedious, whose fault is it? I have directed
 them not to quarrel with the opinion of the Council
 of the first use you make of this principle
 of the right of private judgment, is to infer
 from it a right to communicate, or publish
 one's sentiments to others. "A private
 christian may judge for himself," say you;
 "he may communicate his sentiments concern-
 ing any passage of scripture, or any point of
 doctrine, or duty he takes himself to be obliged
 to the performance of; he may communicate
 with some, more, or as many as he pleases."
 This, I apprehend, is loosely inferred. For
 there is a wide difference, as to the conse-
 quence of it, between the private christian's
 judging for himself, in any point of doctrine,
 and taking upon him to publish, to as many
 as he pleases, his notions concerning the same.
 What a man thinks or believes, he cannot
 help; be it good or bad; and he has good
 right

right to his own thoughts, as they need be troublesome to no one. But that he has a clear and undoubted a right to busy himself in propagating his notions, whatever they be, will not be so readily granted, at least, as a just inference from the principle assumed. However, for argument's sake, in the present case, let it be granted. Then you proceed—

"If these agree in their sentiments, and are of opinion, that it will be for mutual edification, and safety in the profession of christianity, to unite in a society for that purpose, it is lawful for them so to do; provided they hold no opinions injurious to others, or contrary to the laws of the civil society to which they belong."—PROVIDED they hold no opinions injurious to others!—But pray, Sir, recollect the principle on which this society is founded, viz. *"Every man has a right to judge for himself of the sense of scripture, and the obligations*

"obligations" he is laid under thereby."—
 Every man then may hold his own opinion,
 and can, according to this principle, hold no
 opinions injurious to others; since he cannot
 do any injury to others, by holding only what
 he has a right to, viz. his own opinion; in
 other words, by *judging for himself*. And
 indeed, it is not easy to conceive, how opi-
 nions can be injurious to *others*, or at all affect
 any persons but *those* that hold them.

SHALL we suppose, therefore, that, instead
 of this proviso against *holding* injurious opinions,
 you meant to say, "provided they *communicate*,
 "publish, or *propagate*, no opinions injurious
 "to others." But then this restriction is incon-
 sistent with your preceding assertion, viz. "that
 "any private christian may *communicate* his
 "sentiments concerning any point of doc-
 "trine—that he may communicate this to
 "one, two, or as many as he pleases." Now,
 if any private christian, before his entrance
 into

into the society you speak of, had a right to do this, he has a right to it still : his becoming a member of the society not excluding him from any christian privilege. Every one of the society, and therefore the whole society, have a right to communicate the opinions which they hold to others—"to as many as they please."

OR will it mend your argument, to understand you as having meant to allow this right to every private christian, of communicating his sentiments or opinions, but yet with this restriction, "that his opinions be not injurious to others?"—But such a restriction renders the exercise of this right extremely precarious and uncertain, if it doth not totally preclude it. For when shall he venture to exercise it?—Which of his opinions may he with safety communicate, and which ought he to look upon as injurious?—Or who must be judge in this case?—You will not allow himself, I

suppose, to be the judge.—That would be to take off the restriction you laid him under in the exercise of this right: Seeing no man can think any of his own opinions, on any point of doctrine, injurious. And if others are appointed judges of the matter, then you subject him to a foreign jurisdiction, contrary to the protestant principle on which you profess to argue. You lodge this right in a partial and unequal manner, and extend it not in the same degree to every private christian. For the judges, according to this supposition, may hold and communicate any opinions, but those which in *their own* judgment are injurious; that is, in truth, *all* their own opinions; while the private christian has not this liberty, but must regulate his conduct, in this respect, by the judgment of other men.

Now, as it is among individuals, so it will be with societies.—And therefore we may ask you, whether you mean that this society you
speak

Speak of shall be restricted in professing and divulging their opinions, by *their own* judgment, or by that of some *other* society?—If the former, the restriction amounts to nothing; as no society can be supposed to judge their own opinions to be injurious to others. If the latter, your projected society becomes dependent upon another society, and enjoys not that equal liberty, which it would do if founded in that protestant principle, on which you undertake to vindicate its constitution. See then, dear Sir, what confusion and embarrassment already attend you, in meditating a defence of the equity of imposing subscription to human, systematical articles of faith!

BUT your great caution has suggested another *proviso*, by way of a restriction upon the liberty of a religious society in exercising their right of *holding opinions*, viz. provided they hold no opinions “*contrary to the laws of the*

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“civil

"civil society to which they belong."—Surely, Sir, you have not considered the nature and consequence of this restriction! Is it not possible that the laws of a particular civil society may some of them be inequitable, unjust, oppressive, and contrary to the laws of God?—It is possible—It is fact—It is notoriously so in many states of Christendom. And shall the religious society be debarred from holding opinions perfectly agreeable to the principles of natural equity and justice, and to the express laws of God, because they are contrary to the laws of the civil society to which they belong?—The unreasonableness of subjecting any religious society to such a state of dependence on the civil power, must surely strike you, without my adding any thing more in illustration of it. For, in one word, it is to subject the Gospel, the blessed Gospel of light and truth, to the institutions of fallible man.—You go on—

"They

“ They may use all such means, as to them seem
 “ proper, to preserve pure amongst them, what
 “ their consciences inform them is the true christian
 “ doctrine, all such means being still subject to the
 “ above restrictions.”*—But the above restric-
 tions have been shewn either to amount to
 nothing, and to leave them at full liberty to
 use any means, they themselves shall judge to
 be warrantable, for this end, or else, to be of
 such a nature as to leave them at liberty to use
 no means, but such as shall be approved of by
 others.—But to attend you in particularizing
 the means of which they may make use,

“ Particularly,” you say, “ they may appoint
 “ an order of men to be public teachers.”†—Yes;
 under the above restrictions.—But, what if
 only one order of men be allowed, by the laws
 “ of the civil society to which they belong,”
 to be public teachers?—They are not, by
 your

* Letters, page 13.

† Ibid.

your proviso, at liberty to appoint another
 order of men, which they might more approve
 of, for the purpose of "preserving among
 them, what their consciences inform them
 "is the true Christian doctrine."
 On *Business*, of what, I would know, are they
 to be public teachers?—May they teach what-
 ever the society hold to be *true christian*
doctrine?—No, if their opinions be deemed
 "injurious, or be contrary to the laws of the
 civil society to which they belong."—What
 privilege, then, is there to any society, in be-
 ing at liberty to appoint an order of men to
 be public teachers, if those teachers are re-
 strained from answering the end of the ap-
 pointers, by promoting such principles as they
 (the appointers) in their own consciences be-
 lieve to be *the true christian doctrine*?—Or
 how can the end of their associating, which
 is supposed to be "for *mutual* edification, and
 "safety

"safety in the *profession* of Christianity," be answered under such restrictions?

LET us suppose, (which may make the case plain) that this society is composed of persons, who believe the doctrine of *Arius*, and who hold the *Arbansian* doctrine concerning the *Divinity* to be unscriptural, and the maintenance thereof an impiety.—May the members of this society appoint an order of men to be public teachers of *it*, among other doctrines, "which their consciences inform them is the *true christian doctrine*, and which they may possibly esteem essential to christianity, and necessary to be taught, in order "to preserve it pure among them?"
If you allow that they may, it must be because you judge that opinion not to be injurious to others. But what if *the church*, in alliance with the *civil power*, adjudge it to be a noxious opinion?—Have they still a right publicly to teach it, in defiance of such authority

authority and judgment against it?—If your proviso bears any certain and determinate meaning, you deny that they have that right. And yet, how will you answer on an inverted state of the case?

The church, in alliance with the state, we shall now suppose to have decided in favour of *Arianism*, and against *Albanasianism*. A private christian judges for himself concerning certain passages of scripture, which to him appear in favour of the *Trinity*. He communicates his sentiments, on this point of doctrine, to several persons, who, agreeing in their sentiments, unite in a society for the purpose of mutual edification, and safety in the profession of christianity. These are desirous to preserve pure amongst them this capital doctrine, which their consciences inform them is *the true christian doctrine*.—May they not use such means as to them seem proper to this end?—Particularly, may they not, if they should think

think it proper and even necessary, appoint an order of men to be public teachers of this doctrine?—Or, is there any equity in restraining them from the use of such means, under pretence of their holding an opinion noxious and injurious to others?—I can hardly think you will allow the equity of such a proceeding towards a society of christians, supposed to be conscientiously of this persuasion: Yet this is no more than the consequence of admitting your reasoning. By virtue of your two restrictions this catholic doctrine is effectually prevented from getting ground in the world. These conscientious christians must content themselves with silently enjoying their opinion, without pretending to procure it esteem and respect among others. But to proceed—

“ Upon the same principles, you say, they may assign such an order of men a due provision.—But as such provision is to arise from the property of the society, they may certainly dispose of that property,

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or any part thereof, as they deem right." * But what society will chuse to dispose of their property for the maintenance of public teachers, who are not allowed to enforce any principles, but such as are approved by another society? Few persons will esteem it any great privilege to be at liberty to dispose of their property on such terms. Well; this, however, if they please, they may do—"And consequently, continue you, they may appoint what tests of admission to such office to them shall seem necessary.—For, certainly, they who give the reward, may fix the terms on which it shall be obtained." † If I understand you, you assert that the society have this right, of requiring of the candidates for the ministry what tests of their religious principles, ‡ they [the appointers] shall

* Letters, page 13.

† Ibid.

‡ By tests of admission, I apprehend you mean, tests of their holding such religious principles, as may be thought necessary qualifications for their admission into the ministry. Am I wrong in conjecturing, that it should have been printed, terms of admission?

shall think proper, *in consequence* of their being the *paymasters*. Let us admit the reason to be good. Then because they pay their own ministers, their ministers are bound to teach whatsoever opinions the society, who find the money, shall deem right. But what they deem right, it must be remembered, may be deemed wrong and injurious by others, and may be contrary to the laws of the civil society to which they belong. And thus you see the right which the society have in consequence of their giving the reward, is inconsistent with the restrictions they are laid under from another consideration; for instance,

WE will suppose, that the society deem it a necessary term of admission to this office, that the candidates for it believe the doctrine of *Arius*, concerning the Son of God; and moreover, that they will teach and defend the same against all opposers thereof. This opinion may be deemed noxious, the propagation of it sub-

versive of the true catholic doctrine; nay, it may be blasphemy in the eye of the law of the civil community.—What is to be done?—In consequence of their supporting, *out of their own property*, an order of men for the purpose of public teaching (and * “ they may, *certainly*, “ dispose of that property, or any part thereof, “ as *they* deem right”) they have a right to demand such a test; and the ministers, who receive the pay, are bound to teach publicly this doctrine. On the other hand, in consequence of the restriction, regarding the quality and tendency of the doctrine, in the judgment of others and in the eye of the law; they have not a right to require this test of the candidates; unless you will insist upon their having a right to fix *any* terms of admission, though they are not to allow the ministers, when entered upon their office, to fulfil but *some* part of their engagements. And this is, at best, an useless and unmeaning right, not worth contending for;

as it implies no privilege to the society, nor can any how operate to their advantage.

THE conclusion, therefore, which you now proceed to draw from the above premises, in favour of the right of requiring subscription is inconclusive, or quite frivolous and insignificant.

"If therefore, you conclude, such a society are
"of opinion, that the requiring subscription to a
"certain form of words, is a proper security of
"the soundness of the principles of their teachers;
"they certainly have a right to require such sub-
"scription."

SUCH subscription as what?—
Subscription to a certain form of words?—This is ambiguous. But they certainly have not a right, if your restrictions are admitted, to require such subscription, or subscription to such a form of words, as they may judge to be a proper security of the soundness of the principles of their teachers: Because by so doing, by using their own judgments alone, they may admit persons to the office of public teaching,

teaching, who *hold opinions injurious to others, or contrary to the laws of the civil society, to which they belong.* Nay, you have not proved, from the premises laid down, that they have a right to require subscription even to the *scriptures*, or to allow their ministers to teach publicly the gospel of *Christ*. For you have restricted the right of the *requirers*, and the duty of the *subscribers*, to a conformity of their religious opinions and doctrines with the *laws* of the *civil* society to which they belong; and some of those laws may happen to be repugnant to the principles of true and genuine christianity. Still more; by your two restrictions you have left it uncertain, whether any private christians, agreeing in their sentiments concerning any points of doctrine, and being of opinion that it will be for mutual edification and advantage in the profession of christianity, can, notwithstanding, lawfully unite in any society for that purpose; seeing it is *not* lawful for them so to do but on this proviso, “that they hold no opinions injurious to others, or
“ contrary

“contrary to the laws of the civil society to
 “which they belong.” For what religious so-
 ciety will you name me, that hold not opi-
 nions, which are either deemed by *some* (and
who must be judge in such a matter?) *inju-
 rious* to others, or which are contrary to the laws
 of the civil society to which they belong?

HAVING thus minutely attended you to the
 close of your argument for the equitable right
 in question, and found your conclusion in
 favour of the same to be miserably defective,
 and inadmissible, on the very premises you
 have laid down; you must excuse my touch-
 ing much more briefly on what you have
 thought proper to add, by way of applying
 your reasoning to our present establishment in
 church.

I am,

Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

Dear Sir,

IT is possible to make out any good title to require subscription to a *larger form*, than that proposed in the Confession, by such reasoning as hath been shewn to be insufficient to justify the requiring subscription to *any* form whatever? It is not possible. And therefore, I look upon the argument, respecting the question we are now upon, to have closed with my last letter. What you produce, however, in favour of subscription to our present form may seem to merit some notice from me, in return for your civility towards our brethren of the establishment. Your argument is taken from the interesting consideration of justice and equity towards the subscribing clergy. Others and particularly our friend the Professor, have hinted at some *general benefit* proposed by our subscription to systematical confessions of faith: But you are the

the first, I think, who has undertaken a formal defence of such subscription, on this footing.

“ If this society,” say you, “ encrease, and
 “ some mens passions or interests incline them not
 “ to submit to the rules voluntarily agreed on;
 “ particularly, if they should object to contribute
 “ their proportion to the ministers provision, and
 “ thereby render their subsistence precarious, and
 “ so discourage worthy men from entering into
 “ the office; the society may surely apply to the
 “ civil power to give a sanction to their own
 “ private voluntary rules, in order to secure to
 “ the ministers the reward due to their labours.
 “ And, in this case, the very making a law for
 “ this purpose, implies a necessity of enjoining
 “ such terms of admission to their office as the
 “ society have thought necessary; because no law
 “ can secure any private property, without de-
 “ scribing the persons who are entituled to it,
 “ and fixing the qualifications, or conditions to

“ be performed, to give a claim to it; and be-
 “ cause it would be unjust, and contrary to the
 “ end aimed at by the society, in calling in the civil
 “ power, to allow any other terms of admission to
 “ the ministry, than such as the society approve.”*

And this you take to have been exactly our case at the reformation. I am sure it was not. But to avoid entering into an unnecessary dispute, I shall confine myself, on this head, to the purport of your reasoning; which is to defend the equitable right of requiring subscription to the XXXIX articles, &c. of the church of England, on this principle, that it is necessary for securing to the clergy the provision due to them.

You had supposed the society to consist of a number of christians, who were united by their own private, voluntary rules, appointing, and paying, by private, voluntary agreement, an order of men for the purpose of public teaching according to a certain form.

What

What form, by the way, is uncertain. It was provided, however, that the members of this society hold no opinions injurious to others, or contrary to the laws of the civil society to which they belong. Such a proviso implies a restriction upon their right of fixing terms of admission to the office of public teaching. For if they have not a right to hold their own opinions, whatever they may be, concerning any passage of scripture, or point of doctrine, they certainly have not a right to propagate them by means of a public ministry. But now you suppose it necessary for the very support of the legal rights of the teachers, that such terms of admission to the ministry be enjoined, as they (the society) think necessary; and "that it would be unjust to allow any other terms of admission than such as the society approve." This is evidently to take off those restrictions from the society, which before you had laid them under; the judgment and approbation of the society being

now made the only rule whereby the law is to operate for securing the property of the ministers. But waving the inconsistency of this account of the matter with what precedes it, let us examine the consequence of it, and see whether it will carry us to the point you aim at, viz. the equity of requiring, from ministers, subscription to our present forms, "as a test of orthodoxy, and consequently, as a title to the profits of their benefices."*

THE society, then, may fix what terms of admission to the office of public teaching they may think necessary and approve. The equity of this you deduce from this circumstance, viz. that the society give the reward. "For, certainly," say you, "they who give the reward may fix the terms on which it shall be obtained."† Let us suppose then, that, besides the church of *England*, there are

* Letters, page 16.

† Ibid. page 13.

in this kingdom several religious societies of protestants, that is, agreeably to your own definition, of "christians, voluntarily united, "by certain rules, or mutual engagements, "for mutual advantage in the profession of "protestantism."* Nor is this a bare supposition; there being at this day many such societies in *England*. Now, because it would be "unjust to allow any other terms of admission to the ministry, than such as the society "approve," each of the societies, fixing its own terms, is perfectly independent on every other, in this respect. One society has no right to interfere with the terms of another. — Further, the right of fixing the terms of admission to the office of public teaching, each according to their own judgment and approbation, is in consequence of their giving the reward. This implies that the reward is given for teaching publicly according to their own respective systems, rules, and ordinances. Is

not

* Letters, page 12.

not that society then *inequitably* dealt by, the members of which are made liable to contribute to reward the public teachers of another society, who teach according to a *different*, it may be, a *contrary* system?—Is not this, I ask, *inequitable* (for we are now enquiring into the *equitable*, not the *legal* right of a protestant society) on your own positions, respecting the constitution of these societies, and the intention with which the reward is given. For each society is supposed to be founded on private, voluntary rules of their own; and the provision for the order of teachers is to arise from the property of the society, “which property, or any part thereof, they may dispose of as they deem right;” and no part thereof can we suppose them voluntarily to dispose of in support of a system of teaching, contrary to that which they prescribe to their own ministers.

not

YOUR

Your argument, therefore, for subscription
 to the articles of the church of *England*, that
 "a test of the principles of her ministers, and
 "in consequence thereof, as entitling them
 "to the profits of their benefices," fails in the
 application of it to fact. For the clergy of the
 church of *England* you suppose to be entitled
 to the profits of their benefices, in consequence
 of their having subscribed, and teaching ac-
 cording to the forms approved by that society
 of christians. That society is likewise supposed
 to enjoy the right of prescribing their own
 system of public teaching, in consequence of
 their giving the reward. And yet the reward
 of the ministers, in other words, the profit of
 their benefices, arise, in a considerable measure,
 from the property of christians belonging to
 other societies, who have their own private
 and voluntary rules, and who pay their own
 ministers for officiating according to their own
 systems respectively. But, Sir, this is too
 delicate

delicate a matter for me to insist upon. In
 supposing your argument for subscription, ground-
 ed on so *interesting* a consideration, I may be
 thought by some to oppose the establishment
 itself. Can you blame me then for dismissing
 this enquiry, which might hazard my incutring
 such a suspicion, and is moreover carrying us
 quite wide of our main point.

Yours, &c.

POSTSCRIPT.

P O S T S C R I P T.

THAT this packet was not sent sooner, attribute to my endeavour to reduce the question within its original limits, and my care to come at your meaning, where there appeared any danger of a misapprehension. This, with some avocations unavoidably intervening, may delay my next, longer than you would expect from the known readiness of your friend to comply with any of your requests.

The END of PART I.

THAT this packet was not lost sooner,
 amounting to my endeavour to reduce the
 question within its original limits, and my
 care to come at your meaning, where there
 appeared any danger of a misapprehension.
 This, with some avocations unavoidably inter-
 vening, may delay my next longer than you
 would expect from the known readiness of
 your friend to comply with any of your
 requests.

LETTERS

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH &c.

By the Rev. Mr. [illegible]

CONFESSORIAL

THE END OF PART I.

PRINTED BY [illegible]

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ADJUTANT